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AUTHOR Bramstedt, Wayne
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ABSTRACT

With its large and heterogeneous Indian population, the Los Angeles area offers an excellent opportunity to study patterns in the origin, growth, and structure of Indian voluntary associations, and the leisure time institutions. Since the 1920's more than 100 Indian voluntary associations formed in the area. Established groups influenced the formation, content, and development of subsequent groups, which tended to be special purpose rather than multipurpose and which often duplicated objectives of established groups in an attempt to remedy actual or perceived shortcomings. Overlapping memberships, whereby a person belonged to two or more voluntary organizations, was one of several mechanisms in a complex network that linked Indian organizations to each other much more than to any non-Indian entity. While overlapping memberships improved communication and transferred knowledge between groups, they also created problems, such as spreading talent too thin and dividing loyalties. Contacts outside the network of Indian groups increased with government funding of anti-poverty-type programs and the growing need for outside help in order for groups to operate successfully. Investigators of urban Indian phenomena should continue to document the intrinsic qualities of leisure time adaptations and discover the conditions that determine their development. (JH)

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AMERICAN INDIAN VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS
IN GREATER LOS ANGELES: AN OVERVIEW



Wayne Bramstedt
Behavioral Sciences Division
El Camino College
Torrance, CA. 90506

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INTRODUCTION

The presence of North American Indians in towns and cities has offered social scientists a wide range of ethnographic opportunities. Yet despite several hundred documents relating to this population category (Bramstedt 1979), what we actually know about it is, in my view, very incomplete. What mainly explains this has been the lengthy focus on only a limited portion of researchable phenomena, a practice that not only has given us a small and possibly distorted view of urban Indians, but has resulted in the irretrievable loss of opportunities to witness important events and examples of adaptation among Indians in various urban settings.

Among other shortcomings, an inordinate amount of concern has focused on matters of migration and personal adjustment; and because attention has concentrated heavily on adjustment in contexts dominated by non-Indians, what we read and hear about urban Indians pertains mostly to their problems or, less frequently, adaptations based on their ability and willingness to conform. Relatedly, research in tribally mixed communities has too often focused on a narrow topic concerning members of one tribe.¹

But what do we know about leisure-time institutions and broad patterns of relations formed and shaped by Indians as they become socially organized in their new milieu and which are limited essentially to their participation? Where are there holistic studies describing the origin, structure, content, operation, and development of key urban Indian communities? Or, are claimed gaps in the literature mere illusions, reflecting the insignificance of such phenomena?

The greater Los Angeles area is excellently suited to examine these questions. Its established population of urban Indians is the largest and includes a broad assortment of sizeable tribal categories (Price 1978:148, 156; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1973), free of constraining forces of prejudice known in urban settings near reservations. Circumstances related to the physical magnitude and extensively heterogeneous nature of the region also offer newcomers seemingly limitless opportunities to select from existing alternatives and, if needed, to create and shape additional behavioral microenvironments as they search for conditions similar to or unlike those left behind (Bramstedt 1977: 48-50).

The selection of urban Indian voluntary associations is especially suitable for an investigation of this type. Such groups, about which little detailed information exists, offer more candid expressions of choice than studies of behavior where involvement was necessary and dominated by standards of the host society and the presence of its members.² Furthermore, the focus is on migrant adaptations occurring above the level of the individual, and investigation would not be limited to matters of one tribe.³

Obviously, a sufficiently detailed account of Indian voluntary associations in the Los Angeles area cannot be presented here, and a synthesis would be too superficial to be useful. Instead, gaps in the literature are addressed by a description of phenomena found to exist above the level of individual groups. First, patterns in the origin, growth, and development of organizations are identified. Next, discussion turns briefly to how

groups were linked to form a network, or system, of organizations. Then, to demonstrate something of the complexity and ethnographic significance of this system, one of several mechanisms discovered to connect groups is described. Finally, external contacts of the network are briefly discussed. Data on which the paper is based were gathered as part of the author's doctoral dissertation research project (Bramstedt 1977).

HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Statistical Overview

The history of Los Angeles area Indian voluntary associations dates back at least to the 1920s and includes more than 100 organizations of such widely differing types as tradition-oriented associations (e.g., powwow clubs), tribal organizations, service groups, politically oriented organizations, athletic associations, youth-oriented groups, education-related organizations, religiously based associations, and groups limited to members of one sex. Table 1, below, shows when groups were known to form and disband during fixed periods prior to 1972.

TABLE 1
AN ENUMERATION OF LOS ANGELES AREA INDIAN
GROUPS KNOWN TO FORM AND DISBAND, 1920-1971

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>NUMBER OF GROUPS KNOWN TO FORM</u>	<u>NUMBER OF GROUPS KNOWN TO DISBAND</u>
"1920s"	5	0
1932-36	4	0
1937-41	0	0
1942-46	0	0
1947-51	0	0
1952-56	5	1
1957-61	15	1
1962-66	18	6
1967-71	38	23
TOTAL	85*	31

*Some named groups could not be placed chronologically.

The fact that no organizations are known to have formed during the 1937-1951 period suggests that significantly more groups existed than were identified. The table further indicates that organizations formed at an accelerating pace beginning in the 1950s.⁴ Of integral importance in understanding this phenomenon were the establishment and expansion of Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation services in Los Angeles. Both directly and indirectly, such programs produced and sustained an Indian population of sufficient size to permit a large number of organizations to arise and coexist, and without which a significant Indian community could not have existed.

Developmental Patterns

A reconstruction of the overall chronology of Indian organizations revealed various developmental patterns. Some were expressed in limited contexts; others became basic developmental themes.

Contrary to African-based findings (e.g., Southall 1961:37-38), nontribal organizations originated first. What primarily explains this is simply that a tribally mixed Indian population formed considerably before tribesmen in numbers sufficient to organize were present and in contact. Subsequently, nontribal groups that arose from this population and their open formal activities became places for tribesmen to meet and thereby served as recruitment pools for their organizations.

Beginning especially in the 1950s, groups organized around similar goals began to form. This produced an overall multi-lineal pattern that further expanded as new types of organiza-

tions formed. Churches began primarily in the 1950s, athletic associations emerged about a decade later, and, among other examples, student organizations first formed in 1968. Organizational categories also developed at different rates. The most rapidly formed category was that of student organizations, while relatively long intervals separated the origin of powwow groups.

Patterns also developed among groups of the same type. The consistent occurrence of fission among churches, the high rate of membership turnover among student groups, and the fragile nature of youth-oriented organizations illustrate cases of patterns differing between categories. In other cases, identical or comparable patterns were expressed independently among different types of groups. One such pattern, a particularly important historical theme, was the increasing tendency of new organizations to specialize, or to narrow their major formal aims, either by selecting portions of the goals of existing Indian groups or by forming around fewer, unique objectives. This multi-purpose to special-purpose tendency was noted primarily among churches, athletic associations, service organizations, and powwow clubs.

Further contributing to the general multilineal pattern of organizational development was the growing tendency of new groups to more or less duplicate objectives of established Indian organizations. Such instances of intra-ethnic parallelism were basically corrective measures, designed to remedy actual or perceived shortcomings in existing programs, and were initiated by dissatisfied members of allegedly inadequate organizations

through fission or by persons involved elsewhere in formal Indian activities.

The accelerated pace of group formations, especially during the late 1960s, was not matched by corresponding shifts in total activity among organizations. Increasingly, new groups were small and did not expand much beyond original size, more charter members soon expressed disinterest through sporadic participation or by quitting, and longer intervals separated activities. Two factors largely accounted for these conditions. First, new groups progressively incorporated more persons who were already involved in formal activities either as members of other Indian organizations or as nonmember participants in their open events. Second, relatively more members preferred to pick and choose from the greater array of open formal events and informal activities that arose in the Indian community, rather than to dedicate themselves to the full range of tasks in their respective groups. Consequently, there was also a corresponding rise in the number of groups that disbanded and became inactive, and organizations became increasingly short-lived.

Another important historical regularity was that a substantial portion of groups organized to provide basic services or activities that were already available through non-Indian programs. A wide range of non-Indian churches, athletic leagues, service-oriented agencies and groups, and other formal programs were generally numerous, well-established, more or less geographically accessible, and open to Indians. This development of parallel ethnic institutions (cf. Broom and Kitsuse 1955) did not result from ignorance among group founders about local

conditions. Rather, such groups were based on the desire to compensate for real or imagined inadequacies in non-Indian programs. Of key importance was the belief that interaction with non-Indians could not provide the same level or type of personal satisfaction that contact with Indians would achieve. Interaction was preferred with others of comparable historical, cultural, and regional backgrounds, and who believed "Indian way." Among service-oriented personnel, it was further asserted that Indians could better understand and help other Indians, and that potential clients would be less reluctant to solicit aid from Indians than from non-Indians.

Probably the most significant finding was that once Indian groups formed and began to sponsor formal activities, these adaptations and the accompanying experiences of participants increasingly affected the form and content of subsequent organizations and their activities. Two important illustrations were the increased tendency of new groups to specialize and the emergence of organizations with goals that duplicated those of established Indian programs. Frequently, too, by-laws of other Indian groups were adopted with little or no modification or else the selection of by-law content was structured by unfavorable experiences in other Indian organizations or their open activities. The increased tendency to recruit members of former and existing Indian groups was of integral importance in these matters.

EXTERNAL CONTACTS: GROUPS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT

As Indian organizations formed and developed, they partici-

pated in two sets of external relations. One set, which involved other local Indian organizations, coalesced eventually into a network, or system, of groups in the sense of Evans-Pritchard's (1940:262-263) definition of social structure or what Blau and Scott (1962:195) termed "organizational sets or webs of organizations." The second set of external relations occurred beyond the network with non-Indian and Indian entities located in and outside the greater Los Angeles area.

The Network

The possibility that Indian organizations were linked much more to one another than to other entities was suggested while attending meetings of the Los Angeles Indian Center, the first group contacted. While a significant portion of persons serving on the board of directors were either officers or rank-and-file members in one or more other Los Angeles area Indian groups, practically no one belonged to a non-Indian organization, excluding a few cases of nominal memberships. More intensive investigation revealed that organizations were actually and conceptually linked to form a network that was the nucleus of the wider Indian community and was ultimately grounded in Indian participation, orientation, and identity.

The actual system of organizations, whose nature was unknown to outsiders and participants alike, was extremely complex, being composed of groups linked unequally and by different types of mechanisms. Broadly speaking, it was the product of federation; participation in common formal Indian activities; formal and informal communicative mechanisms; personal bonds of kinship, tribe, friendship, and acquaintanceship; and overlapping memberships. One mechanism, overlapping member-

ships, has been selected to demonstrate something of the complexity and ethnographic significance of this system.

Overlapping Memberships

One condition that linked nearly all organizations and probably the key contributor to the network was the principle of overlapping, or multiple, memberships, whereby a person belonged to more than one voluntary association. During 1969-1970, about 1,750 persons distributed among nearly 45 groups filled about 2,075 membership positions; at least 50 persons belonged to three or more organizations. Yet, despite the frequency and wide distribution of such memberships, they were not expressed uniformly throughout the organizational network. One distinguishing feature was that of linkage between groups, which varied according to what is here termed "measure," "degree," "ordering," and "level."

Measure

"Measure of linkage" relates to the number of organizations linked to a group by overlapping memberships. Usually, several such ties existed, as in the case of the Little Big Horn Club (a powwow organization), whose members belonged to four other groups in 1970. Sometimes, however, numerous groups were linked to one organization by this principle. Multiple memberships among persons serving on the Los Angeles Indian Center board of directors in 1970 connected that group with 16 organizations. But, while a group was often linked with several organizations, multiple memberships often varied in their distribution among personnel. In the Little Big Horn Club, one member belonged to four other groups, another belonged to one of

the same organizations, and none of the remaining members had outside affiliations. By contrast, 16 of the 18 members serving on the 1970 Indian Center board of directors produced ties with 16 local Indian organizations through 27 overlapping memberships.

Degree

"Degree of linkage" pertains to the extent that groups linked by overlapping memberships shared members. Some links between two organizations were produced by one or a few members. Of 16 groups linked to the Los Angeles Indian Center by multiple memberships of board personnel, ties with ten were single-person links (i.e., achieved by having only one common member). In other cases, two groups were linked by multiple common members.

Ordering

The phrase "ordering of linkage" focuses on the question of how overlapping memberships were arranged according to the declared objectives of connected groups. Usually, organizations with comparable objectives shared few or no members. This was most notably expressed in the church, service, powwow, women's, student, and tribal group categories, where overlapping memberships between organizations of the same type numbered less than a dozen.⁵

Level

Another means by which overlapping membership conditions differed was according to "level of linkage." This phrase attains meaning when it is considered that a person could be a

rank-and-file member in two groups, an officer in both, or an officer in one and a rank-and-file member in the other. The most significant combinations were those that included the position of officer, especially that of president. Officers had authority, more influence, and greater knowledge of group operation, making them better equipped to draw on the resources of one group to benefit another. In terms of registered effects, the most significant condition was that of multiple officerships, whereby a person held office in two or more groups. In 1969, 22 persons (18 males/4 females) held such positions; filling 52 offices, they linked 23 groups. In 1970, 31 individuals (22 males/9 females) held 78 offices, linking 27 organizations.

Uses and Effects of Overlapping Memberships

Uses and effects of overlapping memberships were witnessed at the individual, group, and network levels. However, what was functional at one level was often counterproductive elsewhere. Conditions of measure, degree, ordering, and level of linkage usually weighed heavily in determining the nature and intensity of these phenomena.

The most notable effect was an expansion and intensification of communication between groups and their members. For groups with little or no regular contact, this was the most direct and successful means by which barriers of isolation were surmounted. The importance of this effect was attributable basically to a generally ineffective system of printed media to transmit information.

Overlapping memberships were also means whereby knowledge and skills gained in one organization could be transferred to

another. This tended to narrow chances for failure and to reduce unprofitable discussion and other expenditures of human and material resources. Such benefits were witnessed primarily during initial stages of group existence or when unprecedented types of activity were planned.

These memberships further allowed organizations to share and benefit from scarce, special expertise gained in non-Indian contexts. In one case, five groups utilized financial and business management skills which a member obtained during employment with a Los Angeles savings and loan firm; in four of the groups this person served as treasurer.

Through overlapping memberships, groups could also draw on material resources of other organizations, expand opportunities to conduct fund-raising activities, and introduce elements of their philosophy elsewhere. This was noted particularly when an interlinking member was an officer or, more often, when two groups shared a significant number of members.

Significant benefits were also realized by individuals with multiple memberships. One of the greatest rewards was an increased sense of personal worth felt because of their recognized value as brokers of information about matters relating to different organizations and their participants. Holding several memberships also increased opportunities to interact with other Indians and to participate in Indian activities. This helped compensate for the general absence of regular and frequent communitywide Indian events other than pow wows and permitted greater and more varied involvement for many individuals who found that no one group was sufficiently active to satisfy

social needs. Similarly, multiple memberships served as alternative contexts for participation when individuals were bored with, or otherwise unwilling to take part in, the activity program of one group, especially if it was narrowly based or unchanging. These additional outlets for involvement were used particularly during periods when controversy or other discomforting conditions were experienced in one of the groups.

However, what was functional for individuals was not necessarily functional at the group level. As indicated earlier, a significant portion of persons with multiple memberships were much less willing to dedicate themselves to the full range of membership obligations than to participate selectively in the more enjoyable activities of these groups and Indian community affairs in general.

It was further discovered that the use of overlapping memberships to apportion special skills among several organizations also limited the ability of the individuals involved to render maximum performances in each group. This was witnessed particularly during November through March, when group activity was at its peak.

Multiple memberships were also potential sources of controversy and distrust, especially in cases of persons known to be established, loyal, and hardworking members in one group or who held multiple officerships. The condition of multiple officerships was unquestionably the most dysfunctional, particularly when key organizations with similar goals were involved. Los Angeles Indian Center members repeatedly charged their president, also an officer in the United American Indian Council and the Urban Indian Development Association, with "selling out."

Contact beyond the Network

The second set of external contacts that involved Indian groups occurred outside the network of organizations. These contacts were with non-Indian and Indian individuals, temporary aggregates (i.e., participants in ad hoc meetings, public forums, and other open formal events), and permanent bodies (i.e., public agencies and other organizations) located in or beyond the Los Angeles area. Although organizations differed significantly according to type and degree of such interaction, similarities tended to occur among groups with comparable objectives. This applied especially to type of contact, and was most notably expressed among churches and service, powwow, tribal, and athletic organizations.

Usually, relations with non-Indians were transient and superficial, occurred in the Los Angeles area, and pertained directly or ultimately to needs of groups for cash, kind, or services. The most significant of these contacts were with governmental bodies and private organizations.

Interaction with Indians tended to be much less perfunctory, occur locally, and, though less often, relate to economic matters. The most important of these contacts were with individuals who sought to obtain free goods or services or who attended open formal activities.

The intensity of extra-network contact was not constant. As was true of activity in the system of groups, interaction tended to intensify during the Thanksgiving to Christmas period and diminish during the summer. Besides such cyclic variation, extra-network contact also intensified and expanded in unprece-

dented fashion due both to a marked increase in the number of groups that required a substantial degree of outside assistance to operate successfully and, relatedly, to the formation of governmentally funded anti-poverty-type programs. In this respect, the system of organizations resembled a tribal society being transformed into a peasant community as it notably increased and broadened contacts with the outside world.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the purposes of this paper is to identify gaps in urban Indian documentation; another is to begin to fill these gaps. Ultimately, however, the paper argues for a reorientation in urban Indian research -- toward Indian (i.e., multitribal) adaptations and their long-term developmental patterns which have occurred at levels beyond that of personal adjustment and during leisure-time activity (or what Mayer [1962:590] terms "voluntarily urban behavior"). For such purposes, research should focus on major areas of urban Indian residence, where documentation is inadequate and investigative opportunities are the greatest, especially for holistic community studies.

This paper concentrates on conditions in the system of urban Indian adaptations, which follows basically the suggestions of Gluckman (1961:80) and Mitchell (1966:47-48) that urban research among migrants should begin by examining the urban system of relations rather than changes experienced by individuals as they move from one system to another. Indispensable to this approach is the documentation of standardized modes of co-activity, or institutions, in which individuals and groups interact.⁶

However, urban Indian studies must do more than simply document the intrinsic qualities of leisure-time adaptations. Adap-

tations must also, and no less vigorously, be examined in their environment to discover conditions that influenced or determined their origin, content, and development. Significant attempts to isolate such factors were first made by social anthropologists experienced in African urban research (i.e., Southall 1961:5-6; Mitchell 1966:47ff.; Epstein 1967:276ff; and, later, Little 1971:26). Termed "extrinsic factors" (Southall 1961), "external imperatives" (Mitchell 1966), and "determinants of urban social structure" (Epstein 1967), they were limited essentially and increasingly to conditions located in the immediate urban environment. This approach has been criticized by others, who claim that explanations of migrant adaptations cannot overlook the potential importance of the pre-urban culture of migrants, their prior personal experiences, or the national administrative order and other high level institutions (see, e.g., Anderson 1971, Bramstedt 1977, Bruner 1967, Fiske 1979, Fox 1972, Jones 1972, Segal 1973, Plotnicov 1967, and du Toit 1968).

Research on which this writing is based confirmed a further potentially significant factor to explain migrant responses in urban settings. Identified here as "prior migrant urban adaptations" or, simply, "migrant adaptations," it consists essentially of the social, cultural, and historical features of leisure-time adaptations created by migrants after becoming established in the city, as well as their personal experiences in this newly created environment (Bramstedt 1977:383-391). As noted earlier, once Los Angeles area Indian organizations formed and began to sponsor open formal activities, these adaptations and the accompanying experiences of participants increasingly affected the formation, content, and development of subsequent groups and formal activ-

ities. Eventually, these responses formed a system of groups and institutions that continued to develop refinements appropriate to itself.⁷

Finally, investigators of urban Indian phenomena must no longer ignore ethnographic and theoretical contributions of studies conducted among other urban migrants. This pertains especially to intensive and comprehensive studies undertaken in African urban areas.⁸ Edward Bruner's (1967:284) suggestion that results of African urban research are "Africa-bound" should further remind us that only by broadening the base of knowledge by investigating unexamined urban phenomena can we place in proper perspective the findings of studies conducted elsewhere.

NOTES

¹ Two questions mainly arise with regard to single-tribe studies in tribally mixed urban settings. Do findings apply to other tribal categories? And, can this type of investigation produce an accurate picture of Indian adaptations? It seems that this type of approach reflects the traditional tribal focus of anthropology and a primary concern for rural-urban comparisons as expressed in linear acculturation and detribalization models (see also Gluckman 1961:68-69 and Mayer 1962).

² Why urban Indian voluntary associations have not received more attention is puzzling. These groups and their open formal activities constitute the most obvious signs of an Indian community and are a fundamental source as well as a reflection of pan-Indianism, an otherwise well-recognized phenomenon. Such organizations have also been the main and most effective vehicle by which urban Indians have expressed their needs and complaints

to all levels of government. Furthermore, migrant-constituted voluntary associations have been given significant attention in urban investigations conducted elsewhere, especially in Africa.

³ Voluntary associations are also manageable and clearly definable units for investigation by one researcher and provide opportunity for prolonged internal study, comparison, and analysis in their environment.

⁴ At least 38 groups formed from 1967 to mid-1971, matching the total number known to originate during the prior 15 years.

⁵ These exceptions derived mostly from persons who were slowly easing themselves out of the activities of one group and becoming more involved in those of another.

⁶ Such phenomena were of key significance in producing and sustaining the system of organizations and the wider Indian community. Most important were weekly and annual celebration powwows; local and national athletic tournaments that featured basketball, softball, and bowling; religious activities such as singing events, revivals, and life cycle rituals; conferences, hearings, forums, symposiums, and community meetings; special activities designed to raise money or goods, such as social dances, raffles, and food sales (e.g., "dime-a-dip" dinners, banquets, box socials); open house events; and an annual Indian Day picnic.

⁷ One possible reason why migrant adaptations have not been identified as a potentially significant explanatory factor is that persons who identified such conditions were most concerned about early arrivals to the city, which, of course, was when no established sets of migrant adaptations existed to serve as

preconditions for subsequent adaptations. Another possible reason has been preoccupation with matters relating to Indian involvement in White-controlled institutions, where opportunities to select and shape adaptations would be limited.

⁸ See Epstein (1967:294-295) for a list of basic references.

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